



Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

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**THIS WEEK: Original Installation of Chairs for Visitors
in the Iowa State Capitol Chamber Galleries**

The Iowa State Capitol visitors' gallery chairs were referred to as opera chairs. During Capitol construction in the 1870s and 1880s, opera houses were extremely popular, and this type of seating was common. The Capitol Commissioners ordered 900 opera chairs from A. H. Andrews Company. The opera chairs would serve as seating for the visitors' areas in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

A letter from the A. H. Andrews Company to the Capitol Commissioners on May 1, 1883, states an opera chair would be sent for the Commissioners to "screw down to see if it works." The letters ISH (Iowa State House) were monogrammed on the back of the sample chair. On May 23, 1883, a letter from the A. H. Andrews Company to Capitol Commissioner Robert Finkbine states that the company is glad to hear the chair meets his approval.

Subsequent correspondence from November 1 to December 20, 1883, between the A. H. Andrews Company and the Capitol Commissioners contain

conversations urging the quick delivery of the chairs before December 31, 1883.

The Capitol was dedicated January 17, 1884. Robert Finkbine notes in his report that the gallery chairs did not arrive in time for him to inspect them, only to confirm the correct number had been delivered. The gallery chairs were needed for the celebrations held that day.

Commissioners' reports show a payment of \$6.50 for each chair. In the early 2000s, the gallery chairs were removed and restored.



The ISH monogram is visible on both the front and back of each chair (front).



(back)



The A. H. Andrews Company monogram is also included in the design.